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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 03/03/06

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ARTICLES:

(1) Spot poll on email fiasco

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
March 3, 2006

Questions & Answers
(Figures shown in percentage.)

Q: Do you support the Koizumi cabinet?

Yes	54.8
No	35.0
Other answers (O/A)	2.8
No answer (N/A)	7.4

Q: Which political party do you support now? Pick only one.

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	42.9
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto)	15.1
New Komeito (NK)	3.6
Japanese Communist Party (JCP)	1.6
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto)	1.4
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto)	0.1
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon)	---
Other political parties	0.1
None	31.4
N/A	3.6

Q: The DPJ offered apologies for the recent email uproar, explaining that former Livedoor Co. President Horie's email allegedly directing his staff to send money to LDP Secretary General Takebe's son was a fake. Is this DPJ explanation

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convincing to you?

Yes	10.9
No	77.0
N/A	12.0

Q: The DPJ has decided on a half-year suspension of party membership for its House of Representatives member, Hisayasu Nagata, who took up this email issue in the Diet, and DPJ Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Noda has resigned from his party post. Is this way of taking responsibility over the email fiasco convincing to you?

Yes	19.2
No	70.4
N/A	10.4

Q: Do you think Nagata should resign from his Diet seat to take responsibility?

Yes	60.1
No	31.7
N/A	8.3

Q: DPJ President Maehara kept saying the email was highly credible. Do you think such a response was appropriate?

Yes	11.1
No	78.2
N/A	10.7

Q: Do you think DPJ President Maehara should resign as his party's head to take responsibility for the email uproar?

Yes	45.2
No	45.4
N/A	9.4

Q: Do you think the DPJ is competent enough to take office?

Yes	15.5
No	71.6
N/A	13.0

Q: Do you think the email uproar has increased the public distrust of politics?

Yes	67.5
No	25.5
N/A	7.0

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted March 1-2 over the telephone on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. A total of 1,662 households with one or more voters were sampled, and valid answers were obtained from 932 persons (56.1%).

(2) Tasks to clear before removing ban on US beef imports:
Interview with Masahiko Yamada, agriculture minister in Minshuto's "next cabinet"; Japan's inspection, approval to be made precondition

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ASAHI (Page 15) (Full)
March 3, 2006

I've visited the US many times since late 2003, when the first case of BSE was reported there, as a member of the inspection team of the Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) or of the House of Representatives Agriculture, and Fisheries Committee. I found, through investigations at slaughterhouses and reports from whistleblowers, how sloppy the US government's anti-BSE inspection system is.

These are the four essential measures to prevent BSE: Blanket testing; removal of specified risk materials (SRM); a computerized cattle-identification system; and restrictions on animal feed. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA), however, has been negative about introducing these requirements. The department's negative stance probably results from its being under the strong influence of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), which is lobbying for leading cattle farmers giving priority to their own profits. It is also true that NCBA is an influential support group for the Republican Bush administration.

Vertebral columns, a SRM, were discovered in a US beef shipment to Japan. This case showed the sloppiness of US safety procedures. Japan bans the use of BSE-prone meat-and-bone meal as animal feed. In contrast, the US has introduced insufficient regulations on animal feed. I heard this directly from an officer of the US General Accounting Office, but USDA does not send out a warning even if it finds farmers feed chicks, pigs, and cattle meat-and-bone meal from cows, so the possibility cannot be ruled out that the US has shipped meat-and-bone meal containing SRM to Japan and other countries.

Senior American officers have said that in the US, there are 95 million heads of cattle, 20 times more than Japan, but only two BSE-infected cows have been found. According to the US Administration Inspection Bureau, however, the US has not conducted satisfactory inspections on downer cows unable to walk and has taken even measures to exclude cattle suspected of being infected with BSE from those subject to inspection. As pointed out by Japan's Food Safety Commission, if the same inspection methods as Japan's were adopted in the US, about 200 BSE-positive cows would have been found.

Despite such uncertain factors, the Japanese government, under pressure from the US, decided to resume US beef imports last December. This decision was apparently a mistake. The discovery of vertebral columns in a shipment could have been predicted,

considering sloppy US safety processing.

The government reimposed its ban on US beef imports immediately after the discovery of the Beef Export Verification violation, but it also should stop beef imports from Canada, because US beef could reach Japan through Canada.

It is also suspected that US beef could flow into Japan via Mexico. Though the European Union (EU) gives that nation the same evaluation on the risk of BSE as that for the US, Japan's Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Ministry deems Mexico a country free from BSE risk. Recently, it was learned that US beef was exported to South Korea via Mexico, so Seoul stopped beef imports from Mexico. The Food Safety Commission should urgently

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reassess the risk of BSE on beef from Mexico.

The agreement reached between Japan and the US last December allows authorized meat-processing facilities to export products to Japan even without Japan's inspections. This agreement indisputably reflects Tokyo's concession to Washington's highhandedness. South Korea has imported products only from the facilities it authorized through its own inspections. Japan should make this measure a minimum condition for resuming imports.

I do not mean, though, that all American beef should be shut out of Japan. There are sincere producers and meat packers, even while leading farmers and the US government are highhanded.

There is the option of importing beef only from producer groups introducing the computerized cattle-identification system and packing plants ready to voluntarily carry out blanket testing. The Japanese government must keep in mind the fact that Japan's food safety cannot be protected if it is completely under the thumb of the US.

(3) Prefectural assembly to meet Mar. 24 on X-band radar installation at Shariki

TOO NIPPO (Page 2) (Full)
February 28, 2006

The Aomori prefectural assembly is expected to hold a plenary session March 24 to deliberate on the planned installation of a US military early warning radar system, called the X-band radar, at the Air Self-Defense Force's Shariki Detachment base in the city of Tsugaru, Aomori Prefecture, sources said yesterday. In March, after the prefectural assembly's plenary session, the Aomori prefectural government will brief local residents on the planned radar installation in the city of Tsugaru and other municipalities.

In March, the Japanese and US governments will release a final report on the realignment of US forces in Japan. The report will incorporate the X-band radar installation. The government will presumably ask Aomori Prefecture in early March at the earliest to cooperate on the radar's location. The prefectural government will provide explanations to the prefectural assembly during its regular session.

The prefectural assembly is expected to ask Defense Agency, Defense Facilities Administration Agency, and other government officials to attend the plenary session. Meanwhile, the prefectural government has set up a panel of experts and has asked the panel to study the radar installation. The panel's members are also expected to be called on to attend the prefectural assembly's plenary session.

The prefectural government is expected to judge on whether to accept the radar installation, based on the plenary session and local briefing. The Liberal Democratic Party is positive about accepting the radar deployment from the perspective of national defense.

Local communities ask Tsugaru municipal assembly to send in petition to government against radar installation

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Japan and the United States are likely to install the X-band radar, an advanced mobile early warning radar system developed by US forces, at the ASDF's Shariki Detachment base in the city of Tsugaru. Concerning this issue, a local group of Tsugaru citizens

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and other neighboring municipal residents opposing the radar deployment petitioned the city's municipal assembly in written form yesterday to send in an anti-deployment statement to the government.

In its petition, the group raises an objection to the radar deployment, reasoning that the deployment could intensify tensions in Northeast Asia, that the deployment conflicts with the constitutionally prohibited right of collective self-defense, that the radar site could be under attack, and that radiowaves could affect the environment. The group has asked the municipal assembly to send in an anti-deployment state to the Defense Agency and the Defense Facilities Administration Agency.

More than ten local residents from Tsugaru, Goshogawara, Hirosaki, and other municipalities organized the group on Feb. 18. "We'd like to continue working on other neighboring municipalities," says one of its secretariat's members.

The Tsugaru municipal assembly will deliberate on the petition in a closed session on March 3.

(4) Budget bill clears Lower House; What will become of remaining half of Diet session? Given breathing room, LDP already in mode for party presidential election; Three potential successors to Koizumi come up with original policies

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
March 3, 2006

While the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ = Minshuto) remaining in chaos over the phony email scandal, the fiscal 2006 budget bill yesterday cleared the Lower House at the initiative of the ruling camp. The government and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) now look composed because of the passage of the budget bill and the self-destruction of the opposition DPJ. They are now shifting focus from Diet policies to the party presidential election in September. In the first half of the Diet session, cabinet ministers regarded as potential successors to Koizumi faced a barrage of questions, indicating growing anticipation for the LDP's presidential election.

During a Lower House Budget Committee meeting on Mar. 2, LDP member Koji Omi questioned three LDP members who are regarded as potential post-Koizumi contenders about their views on measures to deal with the nation's declining birth rate. Budget Committee meetings, which are televised, are the best opportunity for the three to play up their policies. It is at the same time a double-edged sword, because their replies could raise doubts about their ability to handle Diet questions. Opposition party members are also asking questions in order to put them to the test. The current Diet session is taking on an aspect of being a preliminary skirmish for the LDP presidential election.

Abe called for the continuation of Koizumi's structural reform policy when he replied during a Budget Committee meeting on Feb. 6, "Our reform policy is correct." He, on the other hand, indicated a cautious stance to the proposed amendment to the Imperial House Law designed to allow females and their

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descendants to ascend the Imperial throne. He said, "We should be aware of the fact that males have ascended the Imperial throne

and consider how best the Imperial succession system can be maintained, bearing the significance of that fact in mind."

Referring to the criticism by China and South Korea of the prime minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, Aso at a Budget Committee meeting on Feb. 14 defended the prime minister, noting, "China and South Korea are the only countries in Asia with which Japan cannot hold summits."

However when it comes to the question of whether he himself will visit Yasukuni, Aso on a TV program on Feb. 19 kept his distance from Koizumi, saying, "Priority should be given not to individual interests but to national interests."

Both Abe and Aso appear anxious to display their originality through Diet replies, while sharing, in principle, the Koizumi policy. Tanigaki during a Budget Committee meeting on Jan. 27 indicated concern, "Income disparity could emerge in the process of free competition, but it is not desirable that this become permanent." Another potential candidate Yasuo Fukuda, former chief cabinet secretary, is still refraining from making any open comment on the presidential election.

A senior New Komeito official noted that the DPJ's strength would affect the LDP presidential election, saying, "If the DPJ is strong, Mr. Abe would be appropriate for the election, because he is strong in elections, but if the DPJ is weak, the range of options for presidential candidates would widen."

Prime Minister again bullish about maintaining his power base

Now that the fiscal 2006 budget has cleared the Lower House, how Prime Minister Koizumi will maintain his power base through Sept. is another focus of attention. Though his administration was at one time a lame duck because of four setbacks, including the Livedoor incident, the prime minister has completely recovered. He told reporters on the evening of Mar. 2, "Potential post-Koizumi contenders must apply themselves to their own duties as cabinet ministers." He added: "Being a presidential candidate entails an enormous amount of tension. I think it is a good opportunity for them to learn discipline."

The prime minister intends to have the basic policy guidelines on economic and fiscal management and structural reforms for fiscal 2007, as well as the administrative reform promotion bill, adopted at cabinet meetings in June. A battle over a package reform of expenditures and revenues, including the issue of hiking the consumption tax, is expected to heat up. The issue is bound to become a major point of contention for post-Koizumi contenders. It is expected that the prime minister will try to maintain his power base by orchestrating the battle.

Moves to collect as many faction members as possible intensifying

Moves to collect as many faction members as possible are intensifying in the LDP. The 82 first-time lawmakers are the main targets of recruiting. Nearly half of them have already joined political factions despite Prime Minister Koizumi's call for them not to do so. Three factions affiliated with the former Miyazawa faction (Kochi group) are showing moves to reunite. The former Horiuchi faction, whose chairmanship had been vacant, has adopted

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a two-representative system. LDP factions are thus taking complicated movements, including moves to expand or defend their organizations.

First-time lawmakers, once called Koizumi's "children," no longer have the sense of unity they showed shortly after the election. An increasing number of them are now joining factions. Alarmed about the trend, those who are determined to remain independent have formed a group for those who are not affiliated with factions. However, veteran lawmakers predicted that the battle to recruit faction members will become fierce, noting, "Such a group will disintegrate sooner or later."

But with an aspect of a generational change in the presidential race among Abe, the most promising candidate, and the other three likely candidates, factions will not have the decisive power they enjoyed in the past. Various factions are trying to strengthen their unity, though it is expected that mid-ranking and junior members would cross faction lines to support Abe. There is no knowing how successful they will be at defending their organizations.

(5) Is paying homage at Yasukuni Shrine a matter of the heart? Examining the prime minister's constitutional view from perspective of separation of politics and religion

ASAHI (Page 15) (Abridged)

March 2, 2006

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has repeatedly defended his visits to Yasukuni Shrine by citing the freedom of thought and conscience guaranteed in Article 19 of the Constitution. Meeting with fierce criticism from China and South Korea, he also commented, "Is it proper for foreign governments to intervene in a matter of the heart?" How does he find the principle of separation of politics and religion? Is it proper for the country's chief executive officer to brush aside his controversial shrine visits as a matter of the heart? Koizumi's constitutional view raises questions.

The government's view

Although the government's view has been inconsistent, it has always made a distinction between official and private capacities regarding the prime minister's Yasukuni visits. The government's view is that the prime minister is entitled to his freedom of religion as an individual, but a visit to the shrine in his official capacity is subject to substantial constraints in accordance with the constitutional principle of separation of state and religion.

In 1975, Takeo Miki paid homage at Yasukuni on August 15, the anniversary of Japan's World War II surrender. He was the first post-World War II prime minister to do so. The government explained that Miki visited there in his private capacity because: (1) he did not use his official car; (2) he made an offering from his pocket money; (3) he did not put his official title when signing the book; and (4) he did not take any public figures with him.

Three years later in 1978, Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda visited the shrine. Fukuda also made an offering from his pocket money, but he used an official vehicle and was accompanied by official

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aides. In October that year, the government revealed the following view at an Upper House Cabinet Committee meeting:

"As individuals, the prime minister and other state ministers are entitled to the freedom of religion under the Constitution. They are free to visit shrines and temples in their private capacity. Their visits should be regarded as activities in private capacity unless they are designated as government events or offerings are made from the state coffers."

Before the Upper House Rules and Administration Committee in November 1980, the government took the following view, which was more direct than before:

"Questions remain about the constitutionality of visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister and other state ministers in their official capacity. They should refrain from visiting the shrine as state ministers."

In 1985, an advisory panel to the chief cabinet secretary called Council on Visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the Cabinet Ministers produced a report urging the government to search for ways allowing state ministers to visit the shrine without violating the principle of separation of politics and religion. The report

essentially urged the government to turn around its view, posing questions on the constitutionality of official visits. Based on the report, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone officially visited the controversial shrine on Aug. 15 that year.

The government unveiled the following view at a Lower House Cabinet Committee meeting in October 1985:

"Making a bow at the inner shrine or in front of shrine pavilions during a visit to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister for the purpose of offering condolences to the war dead does not contravene the principle of separation of state and religion."

This serves as the foundation of the government's view today.

Court decisions

The prime minister's visits to the shrine have often found their way to court, but the Supreme Court has yet to make any decision on their constitutionality. Lower courts' decisions have been split, however.

In September 2005, the Osaka District Court ruled Koizumi's shrine visits unconstitutional. The court also said:

"The separation of state and religion resulted from the fact that some religious organizations had suffered severe persecution when State Shinto was regarded as de facto state religion (up to the end of WWII)."

The court ruled that Koizumi's visits to the inner shrine's religious activities gave the public the impression that the state supported Yasukuni Shrine.

The Fukuoka District Court, which also ruled Koizumi's shrine visits unconstitutional, said in April 2004:

"It is not proper for the prime minister to visit Yasukuni Shrine, which honors the war dead of World War II."

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The court took seriously the fact that Koizumi visited Yasukuni knowing that his action would draw domestic and international criticism.

The Tokyo High Court, though, ruled in September 2005 that Koizumi's visits to the shrine were religious activities to pay tribute to the spirits of the war dead based on his personal belief, while indicating that official visits might be unconstitutional. The court took the view that Koizumi was allowed to visit the shrine in line with freedom of religion.

Men in power constrained by Constitution; Private and public matters must not be mixed up

By Yoichi Higuchi, constitutional scholar

Visiting Yasukuni Shrine was a campaign pledge for Prime Minister Koizumi, and he has made it a political issue. It is improper for the prime minister to link his shrine visits to the freedom of conscience guaranteed in Article 19 of the Constitution.

Needless to say, the Constitution is intended to put constraints on words and actions by men in power in order to protect private citizens.

As prime minister, Koizumi represents power himself, so it is illogical to buttress his argument on shrine visits with the Constitution. Questions also remain if he is really aware of why separation of politics and religion was incorporated in the Constitution of Japan. The concept was originally born in the Christian world. In the case of Japan, the government used State Shinto to raise national morale, a secular purpose, during the war, and the regret for that led to the stipulation of separation of religion and state in the Constitution.

In view of the fact that the principle of separation of government and religion resulted from state Shintoism, the prime minister's visit to Yasukuni Shrine that played a major role in Japan's militaristic past would cause a problem naturally in regard to the Constitution.

The prime minister is responsible to serve in the best interests of the country. Koizumi, who has repeatedly dismissed domestic and international criticism of his shrine visits as a matter of the heart, is clearly mixing up personal matters and official duties as person in such a position.

(6) Self-destruction of Minshuto (Part 1): Immaturity exposed

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Slightly abridged)
March 2, 2006

The Weblogs opened up by Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) members have been deluged with floods of protests recently. The following two messages are among those posted on the blog opened by House of Representatives member Akihisa Nagashima: "You should not be playing games, wasting our tax money." "You should look at this problem not from the standpoint of a lawmaker but as a Japanese citizen."

Minshuto has had to admit that its member's accusation of a cash link between Livedoor Co. and a Liberal Democratic Party member's

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son was groundless. In this uproar, questions have been raised about the qualification of Minshuto lawmakers.

Lower House member Hisayasu Nagata, who took up the e-mail issue, was hospitalized in Tokyo on the night of Feb. 23 for being in poor physical condition and was discharged at noon of Feb. 28. He held a press conference the same day, but he did not attend the Lower House plenary session held on the afternoon of Feb. 20, prior to the press conference.

New Komeito Diet Policy Committee Chairman Junji Higashi criticized Nagata for lacking the awareness of being a politician, saying:

"H finally appeared in public again after having been in hiding for a long time and having thrown the Diet into confusion, but he did not show up in the plenary session. This shows how lightly he has treated Diet affairs and what a highhanded posture he has usually taken."

Though Nagata offered an apology in the press conference, he had not yet apologized directly to Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Tsutomu Takebe.

In a joint plenary meeting of Minshuto members of both houses of the Diet on Feb. 28, Lower House member Tetsundo Iwakuni criticized Nagata: "Did he take proper action toward Mr. Takebe prior to the press conference, for instance, by making a phone call to offer an apology?"

Not only Nagata has come under fire. The e-mail furor exposed the immaturity and carelessness of party leader Maehara and other executive members. Maehara was tapped to lead the opposition party, following its crushing defeat in the Lower House election last September.

In a special executive meeting on the morning of Feb. 28, House of Councillors member Satsuki Eda rapped Maehara, saying: "The current executive is childish. It is impossible to set aside the problem with makeshift measures."

Eda was disgusted at the "irresponsibility" of leader Maehara and Secretary General Hatoyama. Maehara and Hatoyama had said on the

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morning of Feb. 28 that they would step down over the e-mail

problem, but they did not. Instead, Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Noda offered to quit his post. A secretary to a Minshuto lawmaker was appalled: "This party has no parent. When junior members are about to head the wrong way, the party veterans don't even try to stop them."

Until the Lower House election last year, Minshuto had steadily increased the number of its seats. Observers analyzed the boost was thanks to increased support from unaffiliated voters in urban areas. There were cases in which young persons with little experience in life got Diet member badges.

Minshuto once introduced a tutor system for the first-term lawmakers elected in the 2003 Lower House election. The aim of the organized education system was to overcome their "spiritual weakness." But the system is now in limbo.

In the Feb. 28 joint plenary meeting of Minshuto members of both houses of the Diet, House of Councillors member Toshio Ogawa

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stressed the necessity of the party's self-reproaching, saying: "The recent (e-mail fiasco) might have made the public think that it is undesirable to hand over political power to Minshuto." A sense of alarm is gradually sweeping across the party. Members fear that there may be no bright future for Minshuto, which is being seen as a perennial opposition party with no capability to assume the reins of government..

(7) Self-destruction of Minshuto (Part 2): President Maehara manages the party as if he is still in college

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Full)
March 3, 2006

On the night of February 28 when Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) President Seiji Maehara was forced to step down from his post to take responsibility for the e-mail fiasco, seven members, including Mitsuo Mitani and Keiro Kitagami, got together at a Tokyo restaurant. The seven were elected for the first time to the Diet in last year's House of Representatives election. They were all concerned about the future of their party.

One lawmaker said:

"The current executive is a party of good friends or a group of persons who have similar characteristics. They have no one who can work behind-the-scenes. I wonder if the party can survive as is."

Some junior lawmakers supporting Maehara even began to question the party leadership, which is now exposed as incompetent, witnessing party leaders' slapdash handling of the e-mail issue.

Maehara has managed the party along with his close friends, including Yoshihiko Noda, who resigned as chairman of the Diet Affairs Committee, Acting Secretary General Koichiro Genba, and Goshi Hosono, his junior in Kyoto University. Maehara, Noda and Genba are graduates of the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management. A lawmaker affiliated with the now defunct Democratic Socialist Party commented: "(Maehara) conducts politics just like college students carrying out activities."

Maehara, who aims to fulfill strong leadership, tried to reach internal consensuses on such basic policies as security and constitutional amendment through his top-down management. For example, without getting approval of the party, he stated in a speech last December that China was a threat to Japan. He then tried to make his view the party's.

Maehara's political methods are similar to those of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who got postal privatization bills through the Diet, refusing harmony and cooperation with anti-postal reform forces in the LDP. Since Maehara has often left Secretary General Hatoyama out of the loop, some party members

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dub him the "mini Koizumi." By calling anti-Koizumi lawmakers as the forces of resistance, Koizumi won public support. One of the reasons why Maehara cannot unify the party is that he does not have a strategy, something that politicians who have managed to clear a number of obstacles usually have developed.

Minshuto's local organizations and support groups of its lawmakers are weak. Although Minshuto is regarded as a party that might form a two-party system with the LDP, the main opposition

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party has only 35 local government assembly members, which means that it is difficult for the party to observe views of voters and local governments, lacking a sense of balance to give consideration to a variety of views in the party.

Hiroshi Yamada, the head of Suginami Ward, dined with Maehara, Noda and Genba on Feb. 7. Yamada, the three lawmakers' senior of the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management, gave them advice, saying, "You have to widen personal network as politicians. I'm worried about your political activities. You must have intelligent agents to establish information networks."

Maehara, however, only replied, "You can say that again."

The e-mail fiasco came about ten days later. Taking the information obtained by lawmaker Hisayasu Nagata on faith, a few members in the party executive decided to take it up at the Diet -- a decision that led the party to self-destruction.

Bunmei Ibuki, a former labor minister, said in a meeting of his faction on March 2:

"Senior lawmakers elected to the Diet a number of times have a political sense of balance and guardedness. But Minshuto has excluded such thinking in its management."

Ibuki's analysis is that this structural problem in Minshuto led to the e-mail uproar.

Yesterday the executive was finally able to pick former Lower House Vice Speaker Kozo Watanabe as chairman of its Diet Affairs Committee. The appointment of Watanabe is probably their afterthought to downplaying of "behind-the-scenes maneuvering" in the party. Maehara's term as president will expire in September. Minshuto members have to work hard against time to unite.

(8) World Click column by Yoichi Kato: US alarmed by rising China, giving warning to strategy-less Japan

ASAHI (Page 15) (Full)
March 2, 2006

By Yoichi Kato, chief of the Asahi Shimbun America Bureau

Last week I was invited to a conference that discussed China's growing influence, hosted by National Defense University (NDU) in the United States. I was expected to speak about how Japan looks at a rising China and what role Japan wants the US to play in this context.

Foreigners invited to the conference besides me were scholars from the Philippines and Thailand and a Mongolian ambassador to the US.

The meeting was the last round of a serial seminar on China the NDU had hosted over the past one year in cooperation with a Washington-based think tank.

Recently a rising China has been a major topic in seminars as well as books published here in the US

But political leaders in the US, unlike those in Japan, do not openly describe China as a threat. Their general tendency is to

try to look as closely as possible into in what direction China will move in the future, for instance, how its economy will develop. They also wonder what China is aiming to achieve in the Asia-Pacific region and whether there is any possibility of America's national interests being eroded by China.

Looking back on the situation in the US immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (in 2001) five years ago, I really feel I am now living in a different age.

At that time I was a guest researcher at NDU. Until Sept. 9 of that year, major research courses and classes there had dealt with China as the theoretical enemy the US would next have to fight. But everything changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. With America's concern shifting to terrorism, China has turned into a partner to fight terrorism together.

But America is again shifting its attitude toward China. Some in the US have since mid-last year begun arguing that the US-China honeymoon is over. This argument is leading to Americans being alarmed by China.

There are a couple of conceivable reasons. First, the US is becoming increasingly concerned about China's military buildup now that the European Union (EU) is moving to lift the embargo on arms exports there. Second, the US is becoming skeptical whether China is serious about nuclear non-proliferation, given little progress in the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear ambitions. In addition, China has been steadily expanding its influence in Southeast Asia and Latin America. This move, too, is irritating the US.

America's recent sense of alarm against China comes mainly from China's long-term regional strategy rather than the immediate task of how to deal with a possible Taiwan Strait crisis.

"China will eat America's lunch." This expression is often used to describe China's erosion of America's influence in Southeast Asia.

Is America's lunch actually being eaten by China? This question has been the topic for discussions among experts (in the US).

"The US is losing," Professor Otto at the National War College said.

"While China has an elaborated (regional) strategy under which it is achieving good results, the US has no strategy and seems unaware that the race has already started," the professor added, criticizing the US.

In contrast, Georgetown University Professor Sutter takes an opposite position. In January, he asserted at another meeting, "China's influence in Asia is limited," dismissing the argument that the US influence is fading away.

Although that argument has yet to be concluded, it is certain that the US and China are in the midst of mega-competition.

The Navy-affiliated think tank CNA Corporation will shortly release a book dealing with that argument. According to the author, China's growing influence in Southeast Asia is likely to have a more significant spillover on Japan and Taiwan than the

US. The author concludes that Japan's lunch has been really eaten up. An evidence of this, the author cited Japan's failed bid for a permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council, adding that some policy-planning officials of the nations in the region are of the opinion that Japan is lacking a comprehensive approach needed to deal with China's expanded influence.

In the NDU conference, I was asked about Japan: "How much

influence does Japan have in Asia?" "What is Japan's regional strategy?"

I answered: "Japan has no regional strategy, although Japan's Foreign Ministry does not agree with me." Following me, a scholar from Thailand said: "We cannot expect much from Japan for it has yet to become a normal country yet."

SCHIEFFER